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LYRICS

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LYRICS

BY

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

Δεῦρο σὺν αὐλητῇσι παρὰ κλαίοντι γελῶντες
πίνωμεν, κείνου κήδεσι τερπόμενοι·

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TO EDMUND GOSSE

*Voice of my soul, how faint your echoes ring !
Children of hope, how negligently dressed !
Friend, if you lean and listen where I sing,
I care not for the rest.*

*Ah, the thin harvest of laborious days !
Truest of critics and of friends most true,
The chastened glories of my slender lays
Be consecrate to you.*

*Rich and profuse your precious balms were shed ;
They smoothed your critic arrows, salved the smart ;
They broke the stubborn pride of hand and head ;
They did not break the heart !*

ETON, 1894.

‘—*nec me mea fallit imago.*’

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A CANTICLE OF COMMON THINGS

I PRAISE Thee, Father, for the sky,
Thy soft translucent canopy,
The pompous cloudland trailing by.

For large and level plains that swell
To wooded height, sequestered dell,
Not waste, but tilled and watered well ;

For elms that break in cloudy green,
With hamlet roofs that peep between,
For orchards rather guessed than seen.

For water, wayward sprite, that runs
So clear and deep neath dusty suns,
To cleanse and cool Thy little ones ;

A CANTICLE OF COMMON THINGS

For thundering weirs and silent wells,
For water-plants with humid cells,
Pink willow-herb and cumfrey bells.

For autumn with his flaming hand
Dashed on the covert, with the brand
Of death, and silence subtly planned ;

For summer indolently fair,
For winter with her keener air,
For spring with her surprises rare.

I praise Thee, Father, for the prize
Of friendship, whether wild or wise,
The sudden glance of answering eyes ;

For motions of bewildering grace,
For spirits sweeter than the face
That screens them ; for that lost embrace.

A CANTICLE OF COMMON THINGS

For sessions leisurely and sweet,
When firelight warms the idle feet,
Where fact and fantasy compete.

For music—ah, the gracious thing!—
Or blown aloft on airy wing,
Or throbbing from the tremulous string!

When in the hushed and crowded choir
A thousand blended pipes conspire
To thrill the soul with vague desire.

For jests that instantly beguile
The saddest brows to unbend and smile;
For masters of melodious style,

For mighty minds to cheer me bent,
More keen than mine, more eloquent,
And how divinely different!

A CANTICLE OF COMMON THINGS

For all illusions, trebly sweet,
Fond dreams of pleasure made complete,
And harbourage for weary feet.

For stubborn hopes that will not die,
Though flouted by the sullen sky,
And based on saddest memory.

For faith that, when my need is sore,
Gleams from a partly-open door,
And shows the firelight on the floor.

For truth herself, that, howsoe'er
Blind in my vileness I despair,
Reigns peerless, absolutely fair ;

For wholesome shame, that strongly schools
The raging impulses of fools
By sudden pangs or patient rules.

A CANTICLE OF COMMON THINGS

For love, that, when my spirit trips,
Through the cold throng towards me slips,
And rains soft kisses on my lips.

I praise Thee, Father, though Thou thrust
Me crying in the common dust,
Not as I will but as I must.

AT TAN-YR-ALLT

FEATHERY woodlands, falling, dipping,
Down from the height to the river's edge ;
Voice of the rivulet, dashing, dripping,
Crevice by crevice, ledge by ledge ;
Lawns high-sloping and sunlit spaces,
Glades that glimmer from crag to plain,
Shy unvisited secret places,
See I fall at your feet again !

Voice of summer, delaying, coming,
Thrushes piping in bush and brake,
Bees round feathery catkins humming,
Buds that slumber and fear to wake ;
Frail anemones, airy, slender,
Stars engendered of wind and dew,
Celandines faithful, violets tender,
Oh ! to be worthy to sing of you !

AT TAN-YR-ALLT

What shall we say of thee, ancient spirit,
Cold in the starlight, hot in the sun?
What are the realms that are thine to inherit—
Art thou manifold, art thou one?
What is thy labour, what thy leisure?
When thou art weary of frost and fire,
Dost thou then, for thy fitful pleasure,
Carve the iris and scent the briar?
Lord of nakedness, Lord of laughter,
Thou that art secret, and great, and glad,
Wilt thou still in the dark hereafter
Smile and frolic, and leave us sad?
When I stoop to the silent portal,
Let me say with my latest breath,
‘Once, in a moment of light, a mortal
Breathed a challenge to Doubt and Death.’

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY, bitter February,

Month of hope withheld and promise vain,
Drenching, under fickle smiles, the unwary
Earth with devastating rain.

Ere the limes with ruddy spear-points glimmer,
Ere the greenness leap from bush to bush,
While the starveling grass grows dim and dimmer,
And the folded snowdrops push;

Ah! be gracious, tenderly relenting,
Take not back thy gifts with churlish hand:
Let the breath of thy serene consenting
Falter through the weary land.

FEBRUARY

Rather thunder on in bleak resistance,
Swift to spoil and rigorous to deny,
Than as thus to veil the sullen distance
With thy bleared and tear-stained sky.

SPRING IN THE CITY

INTO the heart of the town from the woodlands
green where she lingers,

Stealing by grass-grown lanes, unvisited, wind-
ing low,

Wistfully beckons the spring, and blows from her
restless fingers

Kisses that fade on the wind and leap to the
western glow.

‘Sister, my sister,’ the sycamore says, ‘in the
far-off city,’

‘Brothers mine,’ says the elm, ‘in smoky garden
and square,’

‘Break in delicate bloom, O waken for love and
pity’ ;

‘Shake for oblivious eyes your banner of grace
on the air.’

SPRING IN THE CITY

Therefore it was that to-day, where the house-
fronts blink at each other,
Over each inch of earth where the seed and
the rain might fall,
Eager and emulous leaves unfurled, and brother
to brother
Leaned through envious fence and peeped
over sundering wall.

So that the hurrying crowd, with dreary and
careful faces,
Stared at the sudden green, and dreamed they
were children yet,
Wondered if birds still sang in the far familiar
places,
Dallied with childish hopes and smiled in the
eyes of regret.

IN THE HEART OF THE WOOD

IN the heart of the wood,
Where the beeches lean together,
I vowed, as I stood,
In the merry April weather,
I would build me a nest,
I would furl my weary wing,
I would sing myself to rest,
And awake to sing.

Along the grassy ride
I lingered pleasantly,
While the tall pines sighed
Like a falling, rising sea ;
I heard the woodland things
Run swift beneath the trees,
And the pigeon clap his wings
And steer along the breeze.

IN THE HEART OF THE WOOD

On the downs I paced,
Where the swift cloud-shadows
pass,
When the east wind raced,
Singing thin in the grass ;
While the smoky arc was spread
O'er the city, leagues away,
Like a pall above the dead,
In silence and dismay.

But the busy autumn came
With calm and frosty breath,
In his eye a restless flame,
In his hand a dying wreath ;—
As he bared his cruel brow,
The beech grew red as blood ;
The birds were silent now
In the heart of the wood.

IN THE HEART OF THE WOOD

Then November hurried by
With his white and haggard face,
And the slow rain blurred the sky
Where the ragged vapours race ;
And the tall trees cried,
With a drear and desperate sound,
And life before it died
Sank failing under ground ;

And the slow drops fell
On the rotting leaf all day,
And a strange and dying smell
In the silent wood-walks lay,
And the chill mist brooded late
Over many a dripping rood,
And I shuddered as I sate
In the heart of the wood.

IN THE GARDEN

BETWEEN the gusts of toil and fate

I catch at that imagined peace,
That sweetness incommunicate
Which ceases, ere it seems to cease.

The wind, this bright September morn,
Blows large and clear across the down ;
Before me stirs the moving corn,
Behind me hums the little town :

The garden terrace where I stand
Is sheltered from the restless breeze ;
I hear it rustling in the land,
I see it rocking in the trees.

IN THE GARDEN

The partridge from the stubble calls ;
The distant guns unheeded boom ;
And on the mellow garden-walls
The bulging plum puts on her bloom.

Along the walks the ample phlox
In warm luxuriance opens wide ;
The red-rosetted hollyhocks
Toss their pale stalks in upstart pride ;

They drink at will the vital air,
They hope beneath the chilly sky,
They thrive unhidden, nor compare
Their sweetness with their dignity.

Learn here to be at peace, my soul ;
A truce to all unkindly fears ;
The light that shines beyond the goal
Throws back the shadow of the years.

IN THE GARDEN

O fickle heart, amid the din
Still craving, craving after rest,
Before thy harvest-time begin,—
What, art thou never to be blest?

Ay, when thy sorrows are complete,
Thy vaunted idols overthrown,
Some day, hereafter, thou shalt beat
As peacefully as nature's own.

THE WIND-HARP

LoFTY and vast and still

Closes the welcome night ;

The crags grow cold on the hill,

The snows grow firm on the height ;

The streams to the valley leap,

Chafing among the stones,

Lulling the world asleep

Soft, with Æolian tones.

Gone is the pitiless glare,

Branding the shameless earth,

All her reckless despair,

All her intolerant mirth.

THE WIND-HARP

All things slumber and take

Strength that shall cope with time ;

Only I linger awake,

Stringing the listless rhyme.

Whether I wake or dream,

Whether I fly or crawl,

Still I float with the stream,

Still I am one with all.

BY THE CAVE

WITHOUT 'twas life and light ; the large air rolled
Down from the hill ; the merry heather-bird
Strutted and drummed, or through the hillocks
whirred,

Scattering the dew, and bade his mates be bold.

Within, severe and sad, the cold cave wept ;
The filmy tear-drop splashed, or quivering stood
Full-orbed, as in the ancient solitude
Pendant to base minutely nearer crept.

Though still 'tis mine to linger in the sun,
To drink the pure keen scent of heathery miles,
Catching the busy minutes as they run ;
Yet I remember that my joys are brief,
That in the sunless dark eternal grief
Its monumental record slowly piles.

ST. LUKE'S SUMMER AGAIN

A YEAR ago we walked the selfsame road,
Took horse and lingered, dropped from
Hedsor Hill,
And watched the slow stream, how it welled and
flowed
Beside the timbered mill.

The stream, the very eddies seem the same,
The hanger nestles in the huge hill's fold,
The cherry-trees in croft and orchard flame,
Or flaunt in green and gold.

Peace in the valley, peace upon the height ;—
She leaned and beckoned from the woodways
wet.

We dreamed that we should find her ere the night :
Say, have we found her yet ?

ST. LUKE'S SUMMER AGAIN

What have we done to win her? We have schemed
For wealth to buy her, health to seize her
charms,
Glory to tempt her, till we almost dreamed
She lay within our arms.

And yet she comes not ; like a woodland thing
She breaks in terror from her still retreat ;
The clamorous cries that up the valleys ring,
Thunder of hurrying feet,

Have scared her, filled her with bewildered grief ;
They that pursue her, can they love her well ?
Here by the pool, thickstrewn with fallen leaf
Her flying shadow fell.

Not in the rage of those insistent shouts,
Not with the flush upon excited cheeks,
Not in the throbbing of a heart that doubts
The half of what it seeks ;—

ST. LUKE'S SUMMER AGAIN

But when we face the dull laborious day,
 Forgo the secret raptures we had planned,
Upon our burdened shoulders she will lay
 A firm and strenuous hand.

NOVEMBER

WHAT makes my life so cold a thing,

That shivers under generous suns ?

A bird upon a tortured wing,

That runs and rises, falls and runs ;

That suffers, and reluctant learns

What mean the scourge, the brandished rod ;

That turns to sweetness and returns,

Forgetful of the frown of God.

I know a certain shadow sits

Beside me, when I work or pray,

That beats a filmy wing, and flits

Dishonoured in the eye of day.

NOVEMBER

An eager soul that looks beyond,
And scans the other side of bliss ;
That says, she would not need despond
If that were otherwise, and this ;

So should the chemist nicely poise
His tremulous scales to test and weigh
The moon's thin light, the torrent's noise,
And rage against the Eternal Nay.

THE WINTER SLEEP

WHEN the azure distance

In the haze is lost,

When with strong insistence

Broods the quiet frost,

Stills the summer's pleasure,

Checks its reckless grace,

Then tall trees find leisure

And a breathing-space ;

When the dead leaves slacken

Their unwilling hold,

And the elm-boles blacken

Under powdery gold ;

When the freshet roaring

Fuller swirls and swells,

Then the earth is storing

Her diminished wells.

THE WINTER SLEEP

Birds among the thickets

Hold their breath for fear ;

And at home the crickets

Take their winter-cheer.

As the days recapture

Their impetuous breath,

Life is clasped in rapture

To the arms of death.

And shalt thou in sadness

Endless vigil keep ?

Close thine eyes in gladness ;

'Tis thy turn to sleep.

When the lights grow longer

Over stream and plain,

Thou shalt waken stronger

Into life again.

A DEAD STAR

SOMETIMES a bright and burning star
 Grows pale and disappears,
So strangely, infinitely far
 Amid the clustered spheres,

That since it cast the pulsing light
 That o'er our zenith streams,
It strides unnoticed through the night
 Beyond the reach of dreams.

They say the ridgèd crust was dark,
 And cold those glimmering plains,
When Noah steered his ample ark
 Across the hoarded rains ;

A DEAD STAR

The dumb and frozen bulk on high
Still owns a sovereign will ;
In some obscure immensity
It forges onward still.

Like some forgotten prince who lives
Untended and discrowned,—
His proper lustre still survives,
The pomp that girt him round ;

And haply though the source was dry,
The visionary gleam
Still beaconed on, to amplify
A lover's generous dream.

Speed on, speed on, O phantom fire,
Inconsequent, sublime,
Until your faintest ray expire
Upon the edge of time !

THE STAGE OF HEAVEN

THE sun's broad back is leagues away,
The chilly fields are washed with grey ;
The distant woodlands fade
In one thin belt of shade.

The clouds from furthest marge to marge
Grow dark and imminent and large ;
Huge heights and summits dim
Intolerably grim.

The drear uncertain gulf is spanned
By bridges desperately planned,
The cloud fronts drip with red
As though a monster bled.

THE STAGE OF HEAVEN

What means this furious pageantry

Enacted in the tortured sky ?

The impalpable array

Of horror and dismay ?

The tiniest grain of sand would race

Unspent from battlement to base,

The lark's unruffled crest

Might pierce that mountain's breast.

My God, that dost erect thy stage

For such unreal fantastic rage,

And pile these forms unkind

Of mists and subtle wind,

Say, are the woes we read in thee—

Wrath, judgment, blankest misery—

But thy unkindly play,

That dawn-winds sweep away ?

CLOUDS

CLOUDS, by west winds blown

To the gates of morn,

Could I float with you

Over hill and plain,

Float to lands unknown,

Over tracts forlorn,

I might melt in dew,

And be born again !

I am tired of earth,

Tired of toil and gain,

Tired of beating still

At the unyielding bars ;

Death succeeds to birth,

Joy dissolves in pain ;

Let me float at will

Under sky and stars.

CLOUDS

Here the rushing wind
 Shrieks in street and stair,
Pipes his restless lay
 Over roaring woods ;
Higher, unconfined,
 Runs the dizzy air,
Where in vaporous grey
 Tenderest silence broods.

Through your vales of down
 Let my spirit go,
On your shoulders soft
 Stand, and be at rest ;
While the crowded town
 Thunders leagues below,
Soar alone, aloft,
 Sweeping from the west.

BY THE SHORE

RETURN, strong tide,
Return and wander wide ;
 Hither and thither run ;
The trailing sea-wrack starts,
The dry ooze winks and parts
 In the steady sun.

The wrinkled limpet clings
With all his viscid rings,
 To repel the parching air ;
The mussel strains and lifts
His dry lip up, and shifts
 Restless in dumb despair.

BY THE SHORE

Small twisted conchs ashore
Pull close their horny door,
 Weeping slow tears of brine.
The grey gull rocks afloat,
Or wheels with plaintive note,
 Out to the fresh sea-line.

Blow softly, restless breeze ;
The spell that piled the seas
 Drops, and the pent waves run ;
Break, crested billow, break
Creep landward, creep and slake
 The fever of the sun.

THE MILL-WHEEL

TURN, mill-wheel, solemnly turn,
Under the gable fringed with fern ;
Run, swift freshet, steadily run,
Filling the black lips one by one ;

Toss and gurgle thy waters cool,
Ere thou splash in the moss-lined pool ;
Hark how the loud gear sullenly groans,
Whirling, whirling the patient stones !

Haste thee, rivulet, haste away,
All that we ask thou hast done to-day ;
Cease, O streamlet, thy chiding sound,
Hence ! forget thou wast ever bound ;

THE MILL-WHEEL

Leap and linger with fitful gleam,
Till thou plunge in the brimming stream ;
Thine to wander, and thine to be
Merged at length in the monstrous sea.

Only forget not, there at play,
How in the valley, day by day,
Under the gable fringed with ferns,
Black and solemn the mill-wheel turns !

BY THE STREAM

BLOW, breeze, and whisper somewhat from the
hill,

From cool grey stones and beds of heather
brown ;

Lay down thy languid schemes, poor heart,
lay down

Thy piteous hopes, thy fears of shadowy ill.

And listen, listen where the water runs

Under the peaty bank, by shingle white,

Washed through and through when winter
floods unite,

And delicately dried by summer suns.

BY THE STREAM

Let thy free thought flow down with gentle speed
Along the vale, beyond the headland dim,
To drink the sharp scent of the briny weed,
Where on the sandy spit the brooding throng
Of pensive gulls pipe clear their plaintive hymn,
Pipe all at once, like nuns at evensong.

A LILY OF ANNUNCIATION

BURIED and based in dull uncleanly earth,
Amazed I see my patient lily climb,
Who all unseen, about the bones of time
Lays hidden hands of faith: then brave and bold

The sleek stem soars, knowing how firm and deep
Her fibres wind and wander: then she weaves
Hope's ladder high with strong and stately
leaves,
And smiles embattled, being throned so steep.

Last, her precarious citadel she arms,
Trims and anoints with subtlest alchemy
Green spearheads, mutely folded, soon to be

A LILY OF ANNUNCIATION

White trumpets, breathing peace, not raw alarms;
And smites with meek artillery whate'er
Wounds and deflowers the else ambrosial air.

NASTURTIUMS

LEAVES luxurious, large,
Hung like moons on the stalk,
Sprawling from marge to marge,
Fringing my garden walk,
Supple and sleek you twine,
Facing the tranquil west,
Velvety-veined, each line
Breathing of warmth and rest.

Then when the waiting earth
Thrills at the touch of spring,
Stung into sudden birth,
Up to the light you fling

NASTURTIUMS

Passionate-hued, like fire,
 Petal and pointed horn,
Restless as sharp desire,
 Dainty with virgin scorn.

So should the singer go,
 Drinking the friendly air,
Calm, unimpassioned, slow ;—
 Then in a moment rare,
Loosing the pent desire,
 Thrilled with a reckless might,
Break into fury and fire,
 Sparkle and flash with light.

PINES

FUNEREAL pines, your garniture of woe,

Your sable plumes, your listless haggard air,
Were ye sincere, ye would, methinks, forgo.

Yon lively larch is delicately fair ;

She shames your sadness down the woodland
glade,

Yet hath as sharp a servitude to bear ;

Who would bethink him, in your dismal shade,

So true a heart beat 'neath your rugged rind,
And merriest then, when men are most afraid ?

Drinking the harsh roar of the uneasy wind,

Ye triumph, when his stormy clarions blow
To battle, and the slow rain weeps behind.

ROSEMARY

O ROSEMARY, strong rosemary,
That bloomest when the sleet flies free,
And winds are wailing drearily !

Thy stunted leaves are splashed with grey,
Like weeds that feel the salt sea spray,
Or hoar frost on a bitter day ;

Thy rugged branch obscurely grows,
Thy patient bud unnoticed blows,
More faithful than the expected rose :

ROSEMARY

O rosemary, sad rosemary,
O herb of sharpest memory,
Of penitence and purity,

With thee they strew the untimely dead ;
Below the pale world-weary head
Thy pure and patient leaves are spread.

Thy serious scent, thy pungent spray,
Can penetrate and wave away
The sickliest threatenings of decay.

.

O rosemary, shy rosemary,
O bitter sweet philosophy,
That blooms when hope and honour die ;—

Ere love and faith grow obsolete,
Before the blackness yawn complete,
Breathe thro' me, melancholy, sweet,

ROSEMARY

The will to guess what most abides,
The hope that draws the silent tides
To fulness, and the star that guides.

THE ORCHID

My lustrous orchid, rather flesh than flower,
Some rich exotic beetle, gaudy fly,—
The rose outlives her life one rapturous hour,
The violets droop and die,

But thou dost swing with speckled flag unrolled,
With glossy belly, stiffened wings outspread,
Like some outlandish beauty, bought and sold
To please a princely head.

I love thee not for all thy curious art,
Thy patient glories, thy imperious air ;
Thou dost bewilder and amaze the heart,
Not bloom or nestle there.

THE ORCHID

Go hang in tropic glades, where painted birds
Flutter and scream from tower to tower of
bloom ;

Leave me the rose that whispers fragrant words
About my sunless room.

A tortured spirit in a feverish dream,
Spinning strange fancies to beguile his pain,
Surely conceived thee :—'twas the wandering
gleam
Of some o'erweighted brain.

But love was his, and utter tenderness,
Who wrapped the rose in myriad petals
sweet ;—

Avaunt, perfection ! Give me something less
Presumptuous, less complete !

RED FLOWERING CURRANT

RED flower, I fain would sing of you : yet shame
Upon your homely name !

Nay, dear ! so honest, so self-willed a flower,
So true from hour to hour,
So little dainty, yet so pure of scent,
Sharp and indifferent,
Should bear a name that fits the budding-time,
To tremble into rhyme.

Think you that one who kissed and kissed again,
With madness in his brain,
Behind the garden-hedge, when tender spring
Was shy and lingering,

RED FLOWERING CURRANT

When she who needs must love him, tearful, slow,

Still clung, yet bade him go,

Then, as he went, grasped at the scented gloom,

And clutched and crushed the bloom,

And sobbing gave, and left upon his arm

The touch of fingers warm,—

Think you, I say, that he would e'er forget

How cold her cheek and wet?

And on grey days when creeps the glimmering
dawn

About his prosperous lawn,

Not heed the message of remembered pain

You flash along his brain?

Ay, and to me, as here I sing your praise,

A waft of childish days

Comes, of old days I deemed I had forgot—

But some swift voice saith not—

RED FLOWERING CURRANT

Days for whose hours I would exchange long years
Of fortitude and fears ;
The tower, the heathery hill, the fir-clad land,
The soft constraining hand,
Laughter, and flying footsteps on the grass ;—
The red flower saith ‘ Alas !’

O red-lipped flower, white heart that thrusts
between,
O leaf of tender green,
Thou hast more tears and memories to tell
Than one poor heart can spell.

THE GREY PIE

QUAINT grizzled pie, that lettest fall
Thy nibbled fir-cone at my feet,
I thread the monstrous mountain-wall,
I violate thy calm retreat.
This homely and convenient pine,
Through which the sheltered sunbeams
glance,
Was known and dedicated thine,
By right of old inheritance,
Before our grandsires learned to range
Beyond the vales that bear their name :
Our fashions and our fancies change,
But thou, old hermit, art the same.

THE GREY PIE

Thou dost not croak of lands astir
 With madness, novel fires aglow ;
Hung in thy house of tasselled fir,
 Thou art not vexed to hear below
The fleeting laugh of restless fools ;—
 In idle and serene surprise,
Thou view'st the trains of laden
 mules

 Wind up to crag-perched hostelries.
O'er wayside fare the travellers lean,
 The wine-cup tinkles by the path,
Descending blithely, thou dost glean
 A rich exotic aftermath.

As bustling hosts that still must know
 Of heedless travellers how they fare,
And close a casement, and bestow
 An all unnecessary chair,

THE GREY PIE

About the moss-clad rock, about

The pine-tree, thou dost flit and call ;

And scream thy merry message out

‘Be welcome ; there is room for all.’

Perch in thy hospitable pine,

Brave bird, and play thy generous part ;

Hold fast thy treasure ! would ’twere
mine !—

A faithful heart, a merry heart.

THE YAFFLE

LAUGH, woodpecker, down in the wood ;
What do you find that moves your mirth ?
Should I laugh if I understood
All that you know of the merry earth ?
Is it indeed so good ?

All day long has the sunlight lain
Over the valley, across the sea,
Over the meadows that ache for rain,
Hazy hills on the utmost lea,
Herds that graze in the plain ;

Under the crag, where the tree-tops lean,
Flashed your feathers in green and gold,

THE YAFFLE

Stroke by stroke, with a dip between ;
Then you tapped at the woodworm's hold,
Shattered his flimsy screen,

Pulled and swallowed him, writhing soft ;
Was he dreaming of summer too,
Where he swung in the airy croft ?
Had he toiled to be food for you ?
You, where you sate aloft,

Felt the summer in brain and blood,
Pleased to think that your simple craft
Brought you leisure and ample food,—
That was your secret : so you laughed
Loud and long in the wood.

VESPERS

You and I, brave thrush, together,
Tune and trim our careful note ;
I with pen of grey goose-feather,
You with loud and lusty throat.
When the misty house-fronts glimmer,
In the chill reluctant dawn,
When the weary stars grow dimmer,
You awake the slumbering lawn :
Fresh and ardent, merry-hearted,
Singing, drenched with purest dew,
Thanks for tedious glooms departed,
Grace for all you mean to do.

VESPERS

I, meanwhile, unwilling shoulder
 Weighty tasks of import small ;
Chide and smile, till growing bolder,
 When the dusk begins to crawl,
Puff the weary winking ashes
 Into shoots of livelier flame,
Greet the comfortable flashes—
 Wavering hope and flickering fame—
Till the sudden conflagration
 Waves its fire-flags, leaping high,
One august illumination
 Lights the interminable sky.

Yet, sweet bird, could I recover
 What your guarded strophes told,
Hence, far hence, some happy lover
 Pleased would ring my hammered gold.

VESPERS

Could I write the enraptured minute,
 Clasp the imperishable beam,
All the grace that sleeps within it,
 Lilies' scent and sunset gleam ;
From your airy inspiration,
 I might win the inward ease,
Win serene and soft elation
 Over warring destinies.
Worlds would hush to hear the story,
 Could I once, but once, unfold
All the intolerable glory
 That a mortal heart can hold !

THE SPARROW

O PERTEST, most self-satisfied
Of aught that breathes or moves,
See where you sit, with head aside,
To chirp your vulgar loves :
Or raking in the uncleanly street
You bolt your ugly meal,
Undaunted by the approaching feet,
The heedless splashing wheel.

Old poets in your praise were stirred—
I fear you must forget—
Catullus loved you, shameless bird,
You were his lady's pet.

THE SPARROW

You heard her dainty breathing, perched
Beside her when she slept ;
You died :—her pretty cheeks were
smirched ;—
And 'twas for you she wept.

The imperious Bustard strides no more
Across the grassy waste ;
The gallant Ruff deserts the shore
He trampled into paste ;
The Oriole falls, a flaming sprite,
Before the unsparing gun :
Whilst thou by some diviner right
Dost wanton in the sun.

When prey is scarce, when tempests fret
And freeze the stiffening loam,
The worm has tunnelled deeper yet,
The beetle sits at home,

THE SPARROW

You shake your chilly limbs, and puff
Your crest in mild surprise,
And peep, a ball of downy fluff,
With bright and beaded eyes.

No secret raptures thrill your throat
On fragrant moonlit nights ;
You never had the mind to note
Indignities or slights ;
The soul that craves, but rarely finds,
The vague, the high, the true,
The weaknesses of noble minds,—
They never troubled you.

Your selfish purpose never swerves
From its appointed end ;
Your sturdy bonhomie deserves
Success, but ne'er a friend.

THE SPARROW

Where sweetness languishes, and grace,
You multiply and thrive ;—
It proves you, of the feathered race,
The fittest to survive.

Contentment and equality
Are pleasing names enough ;
But we prefer, we know not why,
A more ethereal stuff.
Ignoble welfare,—doubtful good—
We see with clouded eyes ;
We did not make the world,—yet would
To God 'twere otherwise !

WOUNDS

THE wounded bird sped on with shattered wing,
And gained the holt, and ran a little space,
Where briar and bracken twined a hiding-place ;
There lay and wondered at the grievous thing.

With patient filmy eye he peeped, and heard
Big blood-drops oozing on the fallen leaf ;
There hour by hour in uncomplaining grief
He watched with pain, but neither cried nor stirred.

The merry sportsmen tramped contented home,
He heard their happy laughter die away ;—
Across the stubble by the covert side
His merry comrades called at eventide ;
They breathed the fragrant air, alert and gay,
And he was sad because his hour was come.

THE ANT-HEAP

HIGH in the woodland, on the mountain side,
I ponder, half a golden afternoon,
Storing deep strength to battle with the tide
I must encounter soon.

Absorbed, inquisitive, alert, irate,
The wiry wood-ants run beneath the pines,
And bristle if a careless footfall grate
Among their travelled lines.

With prey unwieldy, slain in alien lands,
When shadows fall aslant, laden they come,
Where, piled of red fir-needles, guarded stands
Their dry and rustling dome.

THE ANT-HEAP

They toil for what they know not ; rest they shun ;

They nip the soft intruder ; when they die,

They grapple pain and fate, and ask from none

The pity they deny.

THE NEWT

WHAT means this enmity 'twixt life and life
Both bidden to be here?—
This dull, instinctive hate, compelling strife
With what I scorn, yet fear?
I fondly bend above the crystal pool,
And start to see thee rise,
Grim water-demon, sliding through the cool
With horns and humps and eyes.
The mystic wavings of thy arrowy tail,
Thy helpless groping hands
(I follow ancient sages)—can avail
To sicken, where he stands,

THE NEWT

The thirsty ox, that with blunt muzzle bends
 To draw the warm wave in,
Whilst thou for thine obscene and secret ends
 Dost work the dainty sin.
Thou with corroding venom, deftly flung
 In unsuspecting eyes,
Didst blind the stripling that hot-handed hung
 To pull his liliated prize.

Nay, I suspend my fury ; let me see
 How thou, uncleanly eft,
Dost while away in loathly alchemy
 The hours of daylight left :
I'll see thee pack in folded water-leaves
 Thy black and oozy egg,
Or swallow down the filmy phantom greaves
 Torn from thy naked leg,

THE NEWT

Or rend thy smoother, sicklier brother—him
 Thou dost devour in deep
And tangled dens, in weedy coverts dim,
 Then sink in sullen sleep.
But when the brief spring days are o'er, and thou
 Hast loved, and slain thy foes,
The crest is doffed that towers above thy brow ;
 A warrior in repose,
Eating not, breathing not, with orange gleam
 Of belly mailed, within
Some damp sequestered cranny, thou dost dream
 Of all thy summer sin.

Thou that wouldst read the riddle of thy birth
 Across the ages old,
And bid the shameless secrets of the earth
 Before thine eyes unfold,

THE NEWT

To breed one puny eft, the sovereign powers
 Conspired and schemed and planned,
The restless sea through dark and tedious hours
 Foamed out the shifting sand ;
A race of forms in monstrous nightmare dreamed
 By spirits ill at ease,
Crawled in the weltering ooze, or dimly gleamed
 Across the plunging seas,
Till Time diminished and enslaved let fall
 His ancient vaster spoil,
And thou, poor water-worm, art heir of all
 The horror and the toil !
The bony relics of thy ancient race
 Hang in the shattered cleft,
And Nature hastens on through wandering space
 To sport with what is left.
She plays her bitter game in smiling scorn
 Until her dreaming age

THE NEWT

Be rent with strong convulsions, tossed and torn ;
As that beleaguered sage,
Who, when the vengeful crowd burst raging
through
The bastions he had planned,
Was pierced by Roman daggers, as he drew
His circles on the sand.

THE BEE ON THE GLACIER

HIGH on the fields of narrowing ice,
By cataracts of toppling snows,
Where precipice on precipice
Frowns nearer, till the gorges close,

Thy velvet hide, thy pinions soft,
Were all too frail, poor piteous thing,
By treacherous breezes whirled aloft,
With frozen trunk and shrivelled wing.

Thy body warmed with milder suns
Has thawed a scant and oozy grave,
The crystal streamlet near thee runs,
Below, the turbid torrents rave.

THE BEE ON THE GLACIER

The ready flower to feed thee bent ;
From bloom to bloom still humming by,
Thou didst not stay to guess what meant
Those shadowy glooms that scaled the sky.

‘ If here so sweetly throng the flowers,
Beyond those summits, thunder-riven,
There must be fairer blooms than ours,
To drink the nearer dews of heaven.’

Until that bright adventurous morn,
Some soaring impulse bade thee haste,
By mounting whirlwinds helpless borne
Across the interminable waste.

Till faint, bewildered, thou wouldst turn
To seek again thy woodland sod ;
The echoed suns too fiercely burn
Beneath the careless eye of God.

THE BEE ON THE GLACIER

Nay, nay.—It was too far, too high :

Alas ! there is no turning back

For him who dares the barren sky,

Who falters in the heavenly track.

The singer, nursed in homely joys,—

The lawn, the long sequestered lane,—

Hears in the air the distant noise

Of hurrying glory, restless gain ;

He might have sung of simple things,

And charmed the listening circle round,

But now in dizzy air he swings,

And seeks in vain to touch the ground.

The harp he might have swept is jarred,

The dusty strings untuneful lie,

With all the merry music marred ;—

For him the silence, and the sky.

THE BEE ON THE GLACIER

If not content to reign below,

There is no throne for him above ;

Oh ! is it well to try to know

How high is truth, how blind is love ?

APIS MATINA

O orange-banded bee,
 Impetuously humming,
You bring sweet news to me
 Of summer coming !

Here in my garden-house,
 Beside a lilac border,
I, like some prisoned mouse,
 In sick disorder,

Bewail the darkened skies,
 Pray that the flowers smell sweeter,
Wish all things otherwise,
 Slower or fleeter !

APIS MATINA

You enter with a hum
Of warlike trumpets blowing,
You lead the months that come
And chase them going ;

The trembling spider stares
Deep in his secret funnel,
Glad if your rude wing spares
His gauzy tunnel.

Softly, more softly, friend !
Why such a furious pother ?
Let speed and leisure blend,
Not slay each other !

So swift your clear wing beats,
With hum melodious noising,
A floating aureole fleets
Around you poising !

APIS MATINA

And where you hang in air,
The dust, the small things under,
Whisk swiftly here and there
In your soft thunder.

O furred and banded bee,
So busy, so decorous,
Would that my melody
Were as sonorous !

Would that my days were spent
In making sweet provision !
Would that I came and went
With like decision !

Old minstrel, ere you go,
To cheer the cheerless weather,
Come, let us softly blow
One stave together !

MORNAY

THE valley broadens to the sea ;
Far up the whispering sand is blown
With mild resistless energy,
To make a desert of its own.

Sunk in the huge hill's massive fold,
Where moor with pasture softly blends,
The long house peers with all its old
Grey chimney-stacks and gable ends.

The stunted wood that seaward lies
Sprawls her mossed boughs along the breeze,
The bitter breeze, that shrieking flies
From league on league of plunging seas.

MORNAY

The high piled rocks, the oozing stream,
The rusty fern, the frozen mere,
I know them not, and yet they seem
So old, so infinitely dear.

And yet the love, the wistful pain
That thrills me, find no answer there ;
Stern Nature seeks no praise, no gain,
Securely, indolently fair.

If I transgress her trivial sway,
She blames not, only thrusts me down,
As frost and sunshine rend away
The rocks that o'er the valley frown.

‘Nay, strive not, murmur not,’ she cries,
‘Some day unnoted thou shalt be,
Or whirled aloft the blustering skies,
Or mingled with the monstrous sea ;

MORNAY

‘ I know not what these fancies are,
 This hungry hope for peace and love ;
My hands are spread from star to star,
 But there are depths beyond, above.’

IN THE CLOISTER

SPIRE, that from half-a-hundred dainty lawns
O'er battlemented wall and privet-fence
Dost brood and muse with mild indifference,
Through golden eves and ragged gusty dawns;—

O cloistered court, O immemorial towers,
O archways, filled from mouldering edge to edge
With sober sunshine, O bird-haunted ledge,
Say, have ye seen her? Shall she soon be ours?

She, whom we seek, most dear when most denied,
Seen but by sidelong glances, past us slips,
Waves from a window, beckons from a door,
Calls from a thicket by the minster-side,
Presses a flying finger to her lips,
Smiles her sad smile, and passes on before.

ASCENDENTI

WHAT dost thou think to find on that sharp peak
Where thou so long dost clamber? Oh! what
gold,

What piled and guarded treasure, far to seek,
Can those grey stones enfold?

Oh, when you based your upward springing feet
On brown elastic heather, by the streams
That from the hill's cold brow loud-chiding fleet,
Where led your soaring dreams?

We in the valley, couched beneath the hill,
Surveyed the tiny speck that travelled on;—
It hardly seemed to move; yet, while the rill
Grew clamorous, it was gone.

ASCENDENTI

Then on the shattered ridge that frets the sky
We marked the creeping shadow, ah ! too slight
To see the hand you waved, to hear the cry
That told the end in sight !

Even as you rose, with motion vast and slow
Uprose the giant hills, that hide behind
The nearer moorland, streaked with flashing snow,
Enormous, undefined.

Blue isles of shadow in the offing slept,
And desert wastes and fertile seignories,
Channelled by streams that onward swelled and
swept,
And veined with sapphire seas.

How fared your quest then, when you lightly rose,
Swung ardent limbs across the dangerous height?
The solemn lustre that around you glows
Hints at some secret sight.

ASCENDENTI

Your serious speech, your faltering eyelids mask

The rapture of the summit that you trod :

We see, we shudder, but we dare not ask ;

So gazed the hosts of God,

When that grim prophet stumbled from the place

Of darkness, to the serried tents below ;

A phantom radiance quivered on his face,

And gushed beside his brow.

FATIDICA

OH, I had thought to find some haggard, stern,
Harsh prophetess, with dim and cloudy brows,
With eyes like winter suns, that under boughs
Knotted and black, in frosty silence burn.

But thou, methinks, art innocent and fair,
With childish hand and gracious pitying eye,
Too sweet to hold the veils of mystery,
And solve the stubborn riddle of despair.

Yet suddenly through guarded eyes breaks forth
A smile that ripples all the face of Death,
And penetrates and glorifies my fears,
As icy stars that shiver from the North,
Frosting my sleeve, at touch of human breath
Fall and dissolve and tremble into tears.

TO THE LADY KITTY

A YEAR ago you were a child
Of rounded cheek and slender limb ;
A spring that bubbled undefiled
With pleasure, pleasure to the brim.

'Twas almost sweet to see you fret,
To win you back to joy again ;
The azure gleam through eyelids wet
Broke fresh as sunshine after rain.

Your sweet advances shyly made,
Your soft caresses hardly won,
Were pure as though an angel prayed
And fickle as the April sun.

TO THE LADY KITTY

You were not fair, as some are fair,
Because your dreams were pure and high ;
Naught lay behind your golden hair,
And your incomparable eye.

You seemed as free as winds that hiss
All day within the tasselled pine ;
The breath of your reluctant kiss
Was warm and sweet as honeyed wine.

Poor baby hand, ungainly grown !
Poor restless limbs that lounge and lie !
The dreams of sovereignty o'erthrown
Still plead in your pathetic eye.

Is beauty like ethereal dew
Absorbed from hence to settle there ?
And has it flown, poor child, from you,
To flaunt and blossom elsewhere ?

TO THE LADY KITTY

Obsequious courtiers hemmed you round ;—

Neglectful now they pass you by ;

You knew not why, but you were crowned ;

You are dethroned, you know not why.

Yet murmur not : no reigning lord

Is served with half such tender care,

As he whose chamber is the sward,

His canopy the common air.

ROSALIND

BURY my summer love in a summer grave,
Under the roses, close to the murmuring wave,
Sigh but one sigh as he slips from sight, no more ;
Then your foot to the stretcher, your hand to
the oar.

It was his will to come when the woods were
green,
Smiling, delaying he stepped the elms between,
I sat musing, the boat swung loose in the tide,
Then as I wondered, he stept with a smile to
my side.

ROSALIND

Green were the streamers that swayed in the
water cool,

Mute were the grave-eyed fish that poised in the
pool,

Deep, how deep, were the heavens of sapphire
blue.

He was tender : I cared not if he were true.

While we floated, the dumb boat jarred on the
bank,

Chilly the breeze crept up, and the red sun sank,
That was the end I knew, when he stept to the
side ;—

Yet, ah yet, was it he or I that died ?

AT NETHER-STOWEY

I

ON Quantock Head the wind blew shrill,
The springs congealed in waxen folds,
Beneath the shoulder of the hill
We dropt across the heathery wolds,

By hanging wood and falling stream ;
The homely plain beneath us lay ;
Far off, the visionary gleam
Of shadowy hills across the bay !

Blue hills of dream-land, so we leave
Your gentle outlines unexplored,
About you glows a holier eve,
Your vales are lined with softer sward,

AT NETHER-STOWEY

But closer traced, the weary hill,
The wrinkled fields, the miry ways,
The same sad earth is with us still,
Her marred delights, her old delays.

II

We lingered in the homely street
Where once an eager spirit came ;
Here stayed his wild and weary feet,
Uncheered by wealth, unblest by fame.

The meagre house, the paven floors,
Were haunted by ethereal airs,
Strange spirits pulled the loose-latched
doors,
Or glided up the crazy stairs.

AT NETHER-STOWEY

The mariner with staring eyes,
The wanton fays of moor and fell,
And underneath the troubled skies
The vampire brood of Christabel.

Ah ! Coleridge, hadst thou played thy part,
Thy human part, with clearer eye !
Hadst thou but stayed thy faltering heart
With aught of wholesome dignity !

O recreant priest of sweet desires,
So soft, so craven, 'twas denied
To trim the sacrificial fires,
And fling the smoking censer wide.

Thy fiery and unflinching mind
Dragged on the shuddering helpless clay,
As Hector's corpse was whirled behind
The flying chariot of dismay.

AT NETHER-STOWEY

From piteous and uncertain lips

The royal message streamed to waste,

Ah me ! in fierce and frail eclipse,

To sink dishonoured and ungraced.

It left thee, as on barren sands

The mouldering porch of ancient kings

In gorgeous desolation stands,

And points to far and fallen things.

IF DREAMS WERE TRUE

If dreams were true I would not care
How petulant the stormwinds blew,
How sharply nipt the outer air,
If dreams were true !

No bitter humour harshly torn
From frail desires, fantastic fears,
No savage errors dumbly borne,
No tainted tears,

No hectic hopes of pride or fame,
No sickly ghosts of wan decay,
No plans to prop a falling name
Should pale my day.

IF DREAMS WERE TRUE

But solemn pageants moving slow
To grave melodious delights,
The voice of waters loud or low
On moonlit nights ;

And woodlands deep, and secret bowers .
Sequestered from the staring day,
Majestic walls and holy towers
In dim array :

And smiling friends who 'd softly speak
Not as they will but as I would,—
No torturing curve of brow or cheek,
No fickle mood ;—

And ah ! my heart's unique desire,
I'd fold your hand, and plead with you ;
You of my homage would not tire,
If dreams were true !

NO REST

I LOOKED and saw that many toiled in vain,
And chose the labour that I loved the best ;
Then came a cloudy sprite that vexed my brain,
That there I might not rest !

I found a friend, the truest ever known,
I crowned him lord of this uneasy breast ;
But love allured him to an ampler throne,
And now I cannot rest.

I sang, and wrote my songs in blood and fire,
‘ Vain thoughts,’ they cried, ‘ ingloriously
drest !’—

There was no room among the emulous choir ;
And there I dared not rest ;—

NO REST

Ah! though I perish, though the sullen stones
Are on my breathless lips securely pressed,
The reckless earth will traffic with my bones,
And there I shall not rest.

AN UNKNOWN MASTER

AH ! how he flung his heart upon the page,
That old musician ; yet, methinks, 'tis all
He left us, redolent of kindly age,
This mellow madrigal :

Ah ! the long days ere this one strain might be !
He heard the plaintive whisper of the shower
On streaming walls, and waited lingeringly
For one celestial hour.

More skilful fell the deft, unwavering hand ;
More negligent the soaring spirit grew ;
A dreaming soul that indolently planned,
And still deferred to do.

AN UNKNOWN MASTER

Sudden it came : 'twas on a summer night ;
The towers loomed black against an emerald sky,
The scent of flowers that sickened in the light
Went richly wandering by :

A rhythmic music beat upon his brain,
A passion too intense to be denied ;—
Eager and airy came the opening strain,
The chords unite, divide,

Or hang suspended, as a breaker leans
O'er-arched, before it whitens on the shore ;
Pure as the silent evening's greys and greens,
As more and ever more

Beat the quick waves of harmony austere,
Marred by no frail and faulty instrument,
But as the angels sing within their sphere,
Above the morning bent,

AN UNKNOWN MASTER

All night the patient hand untiring wrote
Till morning rimmed the east with smouldering
fire,
Until the drowsy bird's uncertain note
Attuned the awakened choir.

Then sank the fount of music : sank and died
To rise no more beneath the lingering touch :
Was this ethereal gem contemned, decried,
Or praised, perchance, too much ?

Was he disheartened that his message beat
With hand too faint the slumbering doors of men ?
Or did he soar, his rapture incomplete,
To dreams beyond our ken ?

GASTON DE FOIX

HALF sunk in marble, soft as down, he lies,
Smiling with that inscrutable content
That comes when brows are grey, and
shoulders bent,
But seldom deigns to brood in younger eyes.

Armed as he fell, he needs no braveries,
No wreath, nor curious gaud, nor jewelled
ring,
Who was not loth to perish, that a king,
A careless king, might sit an hour at ease.

GASTON DE FOIX

Happy the hero who hath served the truth,
And, full of years, is borne through weeping
streets

Amid a weeping nation—happier he
Who in one glorious hour his fate completes,
Setting the seal of immortality
On all the grace and goodliness of youth.

TIMON

THE world is not grown old,
Nor weary, nor afraid ;
It is as bright, as bold,
As when it first was made ;

Its hope as warmly burns,
Its faith as clear, as high ;
On whom it loves it turns
A strong rewarding eye.

And if I think its mirth
Is rude, ungenerous grown,
Its idols things of earth,—
The loss is all mine own.

TIMON

So if I creep away
To woods and rippling streams
To ponder or to pray,
To dream my sickly dreams,

It waves a kind good-bye,
It smiles a careless smile,
Then turns, alert to fly
O'er many a dusty mile.

My woes it soon forgets
In laughter, love, and wine,
Mine are the weak regrets,
The loss, the shame is mine.

DOROTHEA

THEY pass me by, the gay, the wise,
The brave, the strenuous in the race ;
They deem I have not strength to rise,
Or wit to jostle for a place.
They see me dallying with the morn,
Or slumbering when the sun is high,
And half in pity, half in scorn,
They smile, and pass the poet by.

But you whose passion is to wreath
An arm round any suffering thing,
As simple as the air you breathe,
As true as swallow on the wing,

DOROTHEA

You saw, you questioned ; with a look
 You chid me ; you would point me hence,
The only vice you cannot brook
 Is this supine indifference.

Ah, dear ! You are the same, you see ;
 When every moment, near or far,
That sacred instinct bids you be
 None other than the thing you are.
God spared no pains in making you ;—
 But me, and many another one ?
I sometimes wonder if He grew
 Aweary, ere His work was done.

You could not think it, if you would,
 That printed words upon a page
Can breed strange madness in the blood,
 Annulling duty, place, and age ;

DOROTHEA

You never found your heart and brain,
Your very creed of right and wrong
Struck ruinous, and remade again
Within the passage of a song.

I think, if all the world were June,
The faith you worship would be mine ;
The stillness of the summer moon
Is sweet as sacramental wine.
But life is full of rainy days,
When greyness broods within, without ;
I stumble on through miry ways ;
The naked elms are blown about.

You only claim, you say, to be
To your ideal sometimes true :
Oh, be not then so wroth with me,
I serve a sovereign mistress too !

DOROTHEA

I serve her : yet my faith is scant,
 But that you smile, and breathe, and move,
Is all the evidence I want
 Of unimaginable love.

MY POET

I

He came ; I met him face to face,
And shrank amazed, dismayed ; I saw
No patient depth, no tender grace,
No prophet of the eternal law.

But weakness fretting to be great,
Self-consciousness with sidelong eye,
The impotence that dares not wait
For honour, crying ‘ This is I.’

The tyrant of a sullen hour,
He frowned away our mild content ;
And insight only gave him power
To see the slights that were not meant.

MY POET

II

And was it, then, some trick of hand,
Some deft mechanical control,
That bridged the aching gulf, and spanned
The roaring torrent of the soul?

And when convention's trivial bond
Was severed by the trenchant pen,
Was there no single heart beyond?
No hero's pulse? And art thou then

The vision of that brutish king,
A tortured dream at break of day,
A monstrous misbegotten thing,
With head of gold and heart of clay?

IN THE TRAIN

BOUND for the west, I sate alone at ease ;

 The impatient engine puffed a vaporous curl ;

 Last came a bustling man, with boy and girl
That bore his baggage, and were fain to please.

He chid them, spake them roughly : then each
 child

 Looked in his face and strove to understand,

 And when he slept, they laid small hand in hand,
And softly and compassionately smiled.

As tender souls, on whom some bitter loss

 Has fallen, gently name the vanished name,
Tracing the sombre shadow of the cross

 With trembling lips, and plead to be forgiven,
And emulate, or wholly put to shame,

 The careless magnanimity of heaven.

AN ENGLISH SHELL

[IN the summer of 1893 it is said that a peasant, ploughing in a field near Sebastopol, came upon an unexploded English shell, fired in the Crimean war; this he incautiously struck, when the shell exploded, blowing him and his team to pieces.]

I WAS an English shell,
Cunningly made and well,
With a heart of fire in an iron frame,
Ready to break in fury and flame,
Slice through the ranks my raging way,
Dying myself, to slay.

Out from the heart of the battle-ship,
Yelling a song of death, I rose,
Brake from the cannon's smoky lip
Into a land of foes :—

AN ENGLISH SHELL

How was I baffled ? I soared and sank
Over the bastion, across the hill,
Into the lap of a grassy bank,
Impotent there to kill.

Slowly the thunder died away ;—
My merry comrades, how you roared,
Loud and jubilant, while I lay

Sunk in the slothful sward !

Peace came back with her corn and wine,
Smiling faint with a bleeding breast,
While in the offing, over the brine

My battle-ship steered to the West.

Then were the long slopes crowned again
With clustering vines and waving grain,
Winter by winter the stealing rain

Fretted me rotting there.

AN ENGLISH SHELL

Suddenly once as I sadly slept,
Tinkling, the slow team over me stept,
Jarring the ploughshare, I was swept
 Into the breezy air.

Why did he tempt me? I had lain
Year by year in the peaceful rain,
Till my lionlike heart had grown
Dull and motionless, heavy as stone ;—
Mocking, he smote me :—

 Then I leapt
Out in my anger, and screamed and
 swept

Him as he laughed in a storm of blood,
Shattered sinew and flying brain,
Brake the cottage and scarred the wood,
 Roaring across the plain.

How should you blame me? Ay, 'twas
 peace !

AN ENGLISH SHELL

War was the word I had learned to know ;—
Think you, I was an English shell,
Trained one lesson alone to spell—
I had vowed as I lay below,
Vowed to perish and find release
Slaying an English foe.

THE ROCKET

Out of his lair with a thunder-peal,—
(Swiftly the fire-wheels roar and reel)—
Spurning the earth with a hissing heel,

Over the din he strides ;
Scatters his gold on the hungry air,
Free as a comet with trailing hair ;
Over the steeple with lustre rare
Lonely and loud he rides.

Then, as he soars to the height profound,
Softly breaks with a muffled sound,
Parts, and lavishly strews around
Largess of rainbow dyes.

THE ROCKET

Lighting the smoky rolling shroud ;
White and wan are the gazing crowd ;
Then from the silence, large and loud,
Shiver their happy cries.

May not one of the airy sprites,
Weary of passion and hot delights,
Shine and soar through the starry nights ?

Royally, swiftly, rise ?
Must he falter in mid-career ?
May he not gather his strength and steer
On for ever, a shining sphere
Into the gracious skies ?

Nay, the heroic beneficent soul
Hears the insolent murmurs roll,
Soars aloft to an airy goal,
Shedding his vital gleam ;

THE ROCKET

Glad if another may spurn the sod,
Hears in the stillness, alone with God,
Only the plunge of the calcined rod
 Short and sharp in the stream.

THE TRUANT

SOME careless droop of branches o'er the wall,
Some hidden laughter of a stream unseen,
Some breeze that wrote among the rye-grass tall
Its secret form in whorls of rustling green ;—

These drew me from my quest :—for I was sped
On some grave business that demanded haste ;—
Now here I lie and rest my careless head,
Or wade through feathery grasses to the waist.

The birds' song drops : the solemn beetles fly ;
Between the trunks I see the smouldering west ;
At home they blame the truant : what care I ?
I deem the trespass worthier than the quest.

THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

COME away, my brother :

 This is our moment, this ;—
This and none other,
 To snatch our promised bliss.

This is what we planned
 All the summer through,
To climb the arc that spanned
 The flying, falling, dew.

See it hang and stride—
 The bridge of promised good,
Over the city wide,
 Over field and wood !

THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

There by the copse
It plants its fairy lines,
Over the elm-tree tops
It soars and shines !

Swiftly, run swiftly, friend,
Leap the silvery streams,
We shall gain the other end,
And the world of dreams.

When we climb the shining stair
In the silence vast,
God through the dizzy air
Shall make our footsteps fast.

While the grass is dewy wet,
Ere the sun take flight,
And the airy parapet
Tremble and melt in light.

IMAGINATION

WEARY and weak, alone and ill at ease,
I summon subtle sprites that serve me well,
Then, at the bidding of the sudden spell,
The world slips from me ; then the thundering
breeze

Whirls my frail bark beyond the Orcades,
And o'er me hangs, with spire and pinnacle,
A fretted ice-crag stooping through the swell,
Over the broad backs of the ranging seas.

The rapture fades ; the fitful flame flares out,
Leaving me sad, and something less than man,
Pent in the circle of a rugged isle,
A later Prospero, without his smile,
Without his large philosophy, without
Miranda, and alone with Caliban.

THE SECRET

I DREAMED of peace, and woke to find unrest ;
I laid rash hands upon the sweeping train
Of honour, but I bent and clutched in vain,
And patience frowned and mocked my bitter quest.

But one, who slipped unnoted through the throng,
Drew near me, and upheld my faltering feet,
And 'Here' he said, 'where faith and failure meet,
Here is the secret thou hast sought so long.'

As when the traveller, who long hours has scanned,
Beyond the blue horizon, wide outspread,
The sober solemn shadow of the hills,
Starts from his sleep to see how close at hand,
Fretted and channelled by a thousand rills,
Looms out the broad sun-dappled mountain-
head.

LINQUENDA

IN my soul's mansion there are many rooms,
Chamber and oratory, hall and dome,
And some are bare and cold, some dark, and
some

Noisy with humming of a hundred looms.

But one pavilion by the water's brim,
Hid in the pleasaunce, for myself I keep,
Where swinging roses through the window peep,
And stockdoves murmur in the elm-trees dim.

The voices of the morning call me thence,—
The harsh laborious voices,—and I know
That some day my mysterious Lord shall come
To thrust me from my sweet familiar home.
How will He greet me when He bids me hence,
My master? Will He call me loud or low?

OUTWARD BOUND

As sailors loitering in a luscious isle,
A southern land, a land of fire and snow,
Where all night long a still and secret glow
Gilds the rich gloom through many a fragrant mile,

Pulp of exotic fruitage crush, and smile
To hear a strange speech bandied to and fro,
Then, when the sea-horn hums, arise and go
To thankless toil, to bitter food and vile.

So I, without one backward thought, one clasp
Of hands desired, without one shrinking fear
Of seas that thunder over shingly bars,
Would don my battered garb, and strongly grasp
The tiller, worn by faithful hands, and steer
Right onwards for the everlasting stars.

SECURITY

CALM was the raging sea : it prattled beside the
prow ;

Hand over hand the night climbed out of the
burning West,

And the lights of the little port were winking
under the brow,

And a bright eye opened and flashed in the
window I loved the best.

It was then that he crept upon me ; the hillside
swooned from its place

And the stars swung loose in the night at the
crash of the murderous blow ;—

SECURITY

I could have borne to drown, with the raging
wind in my face,
To sob in the seething billow, and sink to the
peace below ;

But to die by a treacherous thrust, with the
harbour-lights on the wave,
To be rolled like a log in the surf, where the
pebbles chafe and hiss,
To be hurried, a nameless horror, ah God ! to a
half-dug grave,
What essence of bodiless joy is recompense
meet for this ?

BEHIND THE BARS

WHITE, white and weary blinked the road,
Dust on the haggard grasses hung,
I stared and sickened as I strove :
Then on the turf my limbs I flung.

A grey stone wall beside me made
The pleasaunce safe from rude essays ;
A trellised wicket half betrayed
Cool beechen stems and winding ways

A tree her branching arms inclined
Bloom-laden, starred with rosy-white
And leaning filled the hungering wind
With spicy scent and sharp delight.

BEHIND THE BARS

As blue as sapphire through the trees
From hidden chimneys soared the smoke,
And children's voices on the breeze
The woodland stillness softly broke.

Yet, as I lingered, came a thing,
A dreary thing, to gaze on me ;
It crouched and muttered shuddering,
And seemed to slip from tree to tree.

I felt the blood in arm and cheek
Prick sharp before the unuttered spell,
I knew not what it came to seek,
But through the bars a shadow fell,

A wicked shadow : from my place
I leapt, I hastened,—yet, meseems,—
O God ! that I had seen its face !
The thing I saw not haunts my dreams.

THE HAUNTED GLADE

Was it screech-owl or jay
With her scream of affright,
That cried by the way
At the fall of the night ?

I know not : I heard
Neither footstep nor shout,
But the slumbering bird
Rushed chattering out ;

Where the slow-oozing spring
Soaks out of the clay,
Some desperate thing
At the close of the day,

THE HAUNTED GLADE

Seemed to stumble and fall
On the mouldering leaf,
With the low bitter call
Of impenitent grief.

So I who had gone
On my sceptical quest,
Hurried upwards and on,
And fled like the rest

With a cry in my ears,
And impalpable things,
And intangible fears
Beating round me like wings.

ΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΖΟΜΕΝΟΣ

You were clear as a sandy spring
After a drought, when its waters run
Evenly, sparingly, filtering
Into the eye of the sun :

Love you took with a placid smile,
Pain you bore with a hopeful sigh ;
Never a thought of gain or guile
Slept in your wide blue eye.

Suddenly, once, at a trivial word,—
Side by side together we stept,—
Rose a tempest that swayed and stirred,
Over your soul it swept.

ΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΖΟΜΕΝΟΣ

Dismal visitants, suddenly,
Pulled the doors in your house of clay ;
Out of the windows there looked at me
Something horrible, grey.

NEVERTHELESS

Ah me ! I thought that life had been more sweet,
More radiant, more triumphant ; I had thought
Some harbourage were here for minds distraught,

Some hope fulfilled, some goal for patient feet ;

Yet, in my tempered grief, my bitterness
That halts upon the threshold of despair,
I too have dreams of somewhat far and fair ;
What others prate and preach, I softly guess.

As one, who walks at dusk, in sordid care
Enwrapt, through ancient streets and gateways grim,
Is smit with sudden wonder as he sees

NEVERTHELESS

The minster lights strike through the misty air,
To find them hang so high among the trees,
And show so subtly fair, so gorgeous-dim.

REALISM

AND truth, you say, is all divine ;

'Tis truth we live by ; let her drench
The shuddering heart like potent wine ;
No matter how she wreck or wrench.

The gracious instincts from their throne,
Or steep the virgin soul in tears ;—
No matter ; let her learn her own
Enormities, her vilest fears,

And sound the sickliest depths of crime,
And creep through roaring drains of woe,
To soar at last, unstained, sublime,
Knowing the worst that man can know ;

REALISM

And having won the firmer ground,
When loathing quickens pity's eyes,
Still lean and beckon underground,
And tempt a struggling foot to rise.

Well, well, it is the stronger way !
Heroic stuff is hardly made ;
But one who dallies with dismay,
Admires your boldness, half-afraid.

He deems that knowledge, bitter-sweet,
Can rust and rot the bars of right,
Till weakness sets her trembling feet
Across the threshold of the night.

She peers, she ventures ; growing bold,
She breathes the enervating air,
And shuns the aspiring summits, cold
And silent, where the dawn is fair.

REALISM

She wonders, aching to be free,
Too soft to burst the uncertain band,
Till chains of drear fatality
Arrest the feeble willing hand.

Nay, let the stainless eye of youth
Be blind to that bewildering light !
When faith and virtue falter, truth
Is handmaid to the hags of night.

.

RELEASE

LONG have I walked within the land of fear
Disordered visions, sick obscurity,
To-day I dare to look within the clear
Pure sky : the chains are broken : I am free.

As when a traveller that has wandered far
In ancient woods entwining monstrous arms,
Steps from the brake and sees the evening star
Hang over open downs and quiet farms.

Or like the diver who, within the stream
Through clouded eyes explored the shoal
beneath,
Glides up with lifted hands, and sees the gleam
Grow green and thin, releasing his pent breath.

RELEASE

Courage, my heart ! knit up thy broken schemes,
Shake off the woes that shadowed and perplexed,
Reap the rich harvest of thy silent dreams,
Thy cares are all behind thee : what is next ?

Sing as thy heart desires, be not ashamed ;
The crystal fount leaps up that sank so low,
The beast that dragged thee back to earth is tamed ;
Thy heart beats high for conquest ; let it go.

DEA HYPA

WHEN I have pulled my curtains soft,
And bolted-to the door,
A strange uncertain footstep oft
Comes faltering on the floor.

When I would learn the gracious deeds
Of lovers and of kings,
She leans across the page, and reads
A tale of bitter things.

When I would ponder deep, and leave
The cares that matter naught,
What use, she cries, to weave and weave
An endless web of thought?

DEA HYPA

Then, when I rise to do my part,
To order and decide,
She mocks and grips my faltering heart,
And shudders at my side.

She cries, and smiles with bitter lips,
‘Why ponder, why arrange
A falling life that slides and slips
From groove to groove of change?’

I know she has no force to slay,
No liberty to harm,
But ’twixt me and the cheerful day
She weaves a shadowy charm.

And when I wander through the wood,
The bickering stream along,
She mutters in the falling flood,
And chills the thristle’s song.

DEA HYPA

Beside the softest bed she stops
To count the sleeper's breath ;
Within the sweetest cup she drops
The vinegar of death.

Ah no! not death ; that were too grave,
Too deep, too far away ;
She thrusts me to some perilous cave,
With faint and fallen day ;

And when I think to find release
From all my shadowy woes,
She robs my slumber of its peace,
My grave of its repose.

Yet when she tires of dreamy strife,
And waives her dismal spell,
I think I never love my life,
My careful life, so well.

DEA HYPA

The sun outbreaks ; the throstles sing

With all their simple might.

Dear God, it is Thy sacred spring !—

What makes my heart so light ?

THE MOMENT

ONE day—it seemed like many other days,
The high-roofed clouds unbroken everywhere,
The hedgerow elms, the dusty weary ways,
 Blinked in the senseless glare—

I laboured sadly through the appointed hours,
Until at eve, in utter discontent,
I drew a sudden rapturous breath of flowers,
 And forth alone I went.

Listless I wandered by the streamlet's side ;
How surely, secretly the water flowed !
Slowly I entered,—dull, dissatisfied,—
 A thicket by the road.

THE MOMENT

‘O weary earth and O unworthy cares,’
I sighed : the balmy silence round me crept,
And stilled the troubled fancy unawares ;—
I know not if I slept,

Only I know that as I lay outworn,
Where the tall flag his pointed blade unfurled,
There flashed across me, of the silence born,
The secret of the world.

Trouble and care and indolent desire
Fell into line : it seemed the world was good ;—
I did not praise, nor argue, nor aspire,
Only I understood.

I thought ‘whatever vile unmanning fears
May strike, whatever jealousies perplex,
The sullen burden of the fretful years
Shall have no power to vex.’

THE MOMENT

Was I awake? I saw the green leaves wave,
Above me thrilled the thrushes' evening song;
I lay in that pure rapture calmly brave,
And infinitely strong.

Then in a moment, as I gained my feet,—
Gone, was it gone? No power could trace or
track;
Though it had seemed so simple and so sweet,
I could not win it back.

Only I think the hour when I am tossed
To darkness, when the tides above me roll,
The mighty secret that I learned and lost
Will greet my waking soul.

REPROOF

You chide me for my sadness ; ‘ hope,’ you say,
Is urgent, and the marching years are just ;
Take heart and hearken ; through the din and
dust

Thrills the calm music of a sweeter day’ ;

Yet when the strident voice of toil is low,
I bend and hearken for the music sweet,
And ah ! the harmony is incomplete,
And blurred with discords of untimely woe.

God help us, for His saints have waited long,
Watched early, suffered hardness, laboured late ;

REPROOF

And yet the air is thick with patient cries,
The world is wounded sore, and cannot rise,
Shot through and through with flying shafts
of fate,
And weighted with irreparable wrong.

REGRET

I HOLD it now more shameful to forget
Than fearful to remember ; if I may
Make choice of pain, my Father, I will pray
That I may suffer rather than regret ;
And this dull aching at my heart to-day
Is harder far to bear than when I set
My passionate heart some golden thing to get,
And, as I clasped it, it was torn away.

‘The world is fair,’ the elder spirit saith,
‘The tide flows fast, and on the further shore
Wait consolations and surprises rare.’
But youth still cries ‘The love that was my faith
Is broken, and the ruined shrine is bare
And I am all alone for evermore.’

ATTRIBUTES

THEY praise the rose for blushing red
And nestling soft and smelling rare,
The mountain, that its haggard head
Mounts up through breezy miles of air.

The painter, who, whate'er he scanned
In finest lineaments could trace,—
They gaze with wonder on his hand
Before they look within his face.

The poet,—he who swiftly caught,
Before the sudden glory died,
In golden words a fleeting thought ;—
They praise, but thrust him from their side.

ATTRIBUTES

O vile desire of praise unproved !

O frailest, most ungenerous fall !

Let me, for one short hour, be loved

For mine own self, or not at all.

THE PRISON WALL

THE future is mine own, mine own ;
 I muse and make it what I will ;—
A monarch on an airy throne,
 A daisy on a silent hill.

With doubting heart and breaking tear
 The present I excuse, deny :
There is one space undimmed and clear
 That may portend a sunnier sky.

But ah ! the past ; her back was turned.
 I spoke and praised her ; when she heard,
Her eye in silent anger burned,
 And dumbly fell the unuttered word.

PRAYER

My sorrow had pierced me through ; it throbbed
in my heart like a thorn ;

This way and that I stared, as a bird with a
broken limb

Hearing the hound's strong feet thrust imminent
through the corn,

So to my God I turned : and I had forgotten
Him.

Into the night I breathed a prayer like a soaring
fire ;—

So to the windswept cliff the resonant rocket
streams,

PRAYER

And it struck its mark, I know ; for I felt my
flying desire

Strain, like a rope drawn home, and catch in
the land of dreams.

What was the answer? This—the horrible
depth of night,

And deeper, as ever I peer, the huge cliff's
mountainous shade,

While the frail boat cracks and grinds, and never
a star in sight,

And the seething waves smite fiercer ;—and yet
I am not afraid.

CONTENT

SWEET tranquil days of measured bliss,
I blame your softness, half afraid
Yet half ashamed to seem to miss
Your morning sun, your evening shade.

I think that when alone, perplexed,
I shudder through some dreary night,
'Twill add new sorrow to be vexed
By mocking ghosts of past delight.

Shame on the morbid hearts that call
Security our chiefest foe ;—
The plums grow big along my wall,
And take no thought of how they grow.

CONTENT

Indifferent whether mortal lips

Unthankful suck their honeyed gold,

Or if the hornèd woodsnail sips

Their sweetness, tumbled on the mould.

· I AM SMALL AND OF NO REPUTA-
TION ; YET DO I NOT FORGET
THY COMMANDMENTS '

How small a thing am I, of no repute,
Whirled in the rush of these eternal tides ;
Spun daily round upon this orb that rides
Among its peers, itself how most minute.

Yet as I muse in sad comparison,
Restless and frail, I thrill with sudden awe,
Clasped in the large embrace of life and law
That, howsoe'er I falter, bears me on.

So should a drop within the sluggish vein
Of some vast saurian, (that slumbers deep
In seas undreamed of, rolling through the swell)
In labyrinthine artery swim and creep,
Yet hear far off, again and yet again,
The vasty heart beat in his central cell,

IN THE FIELD

THE expected loiterer comes at last ;
 Beneath the mellow wall they strip,
Then through the parted crowd stream past
 In shy and serious fellowship.

My captain, skilled, if any there,
 To stem the rush or shoot the goal,
He bids the ardent heart beware,
 And lightly cheers an anxious soul.

To-day is big with mimic fate ;
 Grave nods reply to comrades' smiles ;
Oppressed with little cares of state,
 They gauge an adversary's wiles.

IN THE FIELD

Then, as the shrill cheers echo higher,
They gather for the kindly fray,
And hearts that beat with kindred fire
Draw from young cheeks the blood away.

I hear the old familiar names
In quavering shrillness seize the air,
I mark the unselfish deed that claims
No honour, but is doubly fair ;

Surprises infinitely great,
And little feats of high emprise,
Encouraged by a stormy cheer,
And envied by a thousand eyes.

Then to and fro the struggle veers ;
Be just, be generous if you can ;
And hark how instantly he cheers—
The loud long-coated partisan.

IN THE FIELD

Who wins the palm? who rules the race?

I care not, so the race be run ;—

Defeat may wear a nobler grace

Than easy triumphs lightly won.

What though far hence uncertain fears

Shall dim the fire of childish eyes,

Here pile your store, for after years,

Of seemliest, purest memories.

When ardent spring to autumn yields,

And these young heads are streaked with
grey,

Oh, may you prove in other fields

The faithful zeal you show to-day !

AFTER CONSTRUING

LORD CAESAR, when you sternly wrote
The story of your grim campaigns,
And watched the ragged smoke-wreath float
Above the burning plains,

Amid the impenetrable wood,
Amid the camp's incessant hum,
At eve, beside the tumbling flood
In high Avaricum,

You little recked, imperious head,
When shrilled your shattering trumpet's noise,
Your frigid sections would be read
By bright-eyed English boys.

AFTER CONSTRUING

Ah me ! who penetrates to-day
The secret of your deep designs ?
Your sovereign visions, as you lay
Amid the sleeping lines ?

The Mantuan singer pleading stands ;
From century to century
He leans and reaches wistful hands,
And cannot bear to die.

But you are silent, secret, proud,
No smile upon your haggard face,
As when you eyed the murderous crowd
Beside the statue's base.

I marvel : that Titanic heart
Beats strongly through the arid page,
And we, self-conscious sons of art,
In this bewildering age,

AFTER CONSTRUING

Like dizzy revellers stumbling out

Upon the pure and peaceful night,
Are sobered into troubled doubt,
As swims across our sight

The ray of that sequestered sun,

Far in the illimitable blue,—
The dream of all you left undone,
Of all you dared to do.

AT LOCK-UP

OLD elm, upon whose wrinkled breast
Three strait domains converge, unite,
Three petty lords, of thee possest,
Each deem thee theirs by legal right ;
Three creeping tyrants each empowered
To hew in hypochondriac haste,
To spoil thy greenness, deep embowered,
To spill thy tranquil life, and waste
The giant pulse that throbs and swells,
That drives the mounting sap full-fed
Through arteries and myriad cells,
A hundred feet above my head.

AT LOCK-UP

And doubtless in thy musing hours
Thy spirit, on its airy throne,
Surveys the clustered garden-bowers,
And deems the triple realm thine own.

How cool on early morns in June
To swim aloft in bracing mist,
Before the languors of the noon,
Before the silent vane is kissed
By those pure rays that filter through ;
Ere yet the sun has gathered up
His cloudy skirts, and drunk the dew
Pure-globed within the lily's cup :
While yet the pompous jackdaws shout
Their plain complacent litanies,
And more ethereal, less devout,
The lonely thrush adores the skies.

AT LOCK-UP

Weary of trivial mastery,
And tired of seeming to be stern,
I waste a twilight hour to see
The sullen wintry sunset burn
Behind thy blackening bole, and trace
Thy hieroglyphs of knotted boughs,
A demon arm, a tortured face,
Blind eyes beneath o'erweighted brows ;
Familiar scars, aloft, unseen,
Unnoted when the leaves are fair ;
Forgotten when the world is green ;
But welcomed back when all is bare.

In indistinguishable grey
Ye too are merged : the darkening street
Forgets the noises of the day ;
I hear across the hurrying feet

AT LOCK-UP

The light conventional farewells,
Of lips with no regretful taint,
Rung home by din of cheerful bells,
Imprisoned in serene constraint ;
Young forms across the casements flit,
While blacker grows the thickening gloom,
And one by one the lamps are lit
And twinkle out from room to room.

A DEATH-BED

For once, a little king I lie,
My gentle subjects enter in,
I take from reverent hand and eye
The wistful homage of my kin.

I furl at last the patient wing
That flew unnoticed in the throng ;
They tend me now, a precious thing ;—
They will not need to tend me long ;—

The Father who ordained that here
I should be happiest when forgot,
Will thrust me to no radiant sphere ;—
But see and smile and chide me not,

A DEATH-BED

And keep some corner of His house,
Where such unnoted souls as I
May creep and peep like wainscot mouse,
And trustful and unquestioned lie.

Yet in my heart one secret hope
I cherish, that my God hath planned
For all who find on earth no scope,
No purpose, but from hand to hand

Are tossed and bandied,—hath designed
Some gift of might and mastery ;
Oh, thrice-rewarded, if I find
Perchance my God hath need of me !

And so beyond these sorry walls
These streets my weary feet have trode,
My soul leans out to solemn halls
Of glory, to the Deepes of God.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

(JANUARY 1ST, 1893)

At the dawn of the year in my chamber as I lay,
Wondering I opened my unheeding eyes ;
I could see the shining river, and the road that
wound away,
And the plain, and the sea, and the skies.

There was no smoke from the little sleeping town ;
Keen, chilly keen was the half-lit air ;
On the casement-ivy fell the shadow of the down,
And the dawn came in unaware.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Suddenly, how suddenly, across the golden cloud,
Out of the heart of the mysterious sea,
With her shadowy sails full set, with phantom
hull and shroud,
Came a ship that was meant for me.

Flying out of shadow, into shadow passed away ;
Though I scanned the heaving flats, she was
borne from out my ken ;
Had she cut the far-off waters through alternate
night and day
Was she freighted by man for men ?

Ship, phantom ship, from the islands of the air,
Do you bear me a gift in your dark and
crowded hold ?
Is it love, is it honour, is it death that you bear
Out of the ages old ?

NEW YEAR'S DAY

With honour, glowing honour, I would fain be
crowned ;

And with love, warm love, I should most be
blest.

But how softly, ah ! how softly, death would wrap
me round ;

I know not which would be best.

And the winds of the night said 'hush,' and
sighed away

Over the craggy shoulder of the hill ;

And my heart said 'Yea,' but my spirit answered
'Nay,'

And the dawn said 'which I will.'

As I wondered, as I gazed, with a rush of gor-
geous fire

Over the sea's rim leapt the sudden sun ;

NEW YEAR'S DAY

And I veiled my eyes in pain, and forgot my dim
desire

For the year was indeed begun.

M. E. B.

I THINK that thou art somewhere, strong and free,
Free in some ampler region where the same
High love,—that flickers here with fitful flame,
That speaks at times in wafts of memory

Or on sequestered hills, or by the sea
Broad-rolling, or in tracts of woodland-green,—
Shines forth in steady radiance, full, serene,
Restoring hope, refining purity.

I think that when our hearts are full of mirth,
And glad, without dishonour to the dead,
Thou art consenting from thy secret cell ;
As here the electric pulse, that o'er the earth,
From zones remote and under ocean's bed,
Speaks of my friend and whispers he is well.

AFTERWARDS

It cannot be that my friend is dead
And never a word to me ;
He would have stept in dreams to my bed,
I should have seen him stand at my feet,
Crowned in glory and smiling sweet,
Bidding me rise and see.

Yesterday, when the board was bright,
Chilly the mist outside,
Merry it seemed in the tapers' light ;
Then, it was then he strove with death,
Swooned and shivered and cried for breath,
Lying alone he died.

AFTERWARDS

While I jested, no answer came
 Back from the doors of doom,
Voices crying a phantom name,
No furious gust the windows shook,
No secret sense of a spectral look
 Silenced the clamorous room.

Nay, in the night-time, ere I slept,
 I had no fears for him,
Slowly the stillness round me crept,
Only the hand of the warm spring rain
Whispered soft at the window-pane,
 Only the skies were dim.

Now in the infinite realm of light,
 Fresh from his new-found rest,
Steeped in delicate sound and sight,

AFTERWARDS

Hourly he wanders, seeing clear
All that the tired soul dreams of here,
All that the heart deems best.

See, as a town-bred child that you lead
Over the silver sands,
Gathers the ribbons of glossy weed,
Black-horned sea-egg and twisted shell,
Rare to handle and briny to smell,
Filling his wasted hands ;—

Who would bid him suspend his play,
Silence his rapturous glee ?
Bid him think of the fallen day
Over the city, where vexed and dim
Toils his father who thinks of him,
Saying, ' he thinks of me ' ?

AFTERWARDS

Gladden my restless darling's dreams,
Wonder and wealth of the sea !
Steep his soul in your gracious gleams !
Yet, as he stepped to the silence vast,
Oh, I had thought that just as he passed
He would have thought of me.

GENETHLIACON

WHAT shall I wish for you, O my friend,

What shall I dare to bring,

Now when the turbulent winter's end

Hangs on the verge of spring?

Ragged and black is the fringe of cloud,

Hoarsely the wet winds blow,

Loud is the freshet, chill and loud,

Warm is the life below !

What would you wish for yourself, my friend?

That you would never tell ;

Slow to earn and lavish to spend,

Oh ! you have laboured well.

GENETHLIACON

Treading firm with your strenuous feet,
Gazing with fearless eye,
Praise were sweet to you, art were sweet ;—
Only you pass them by.

Take my pitiful praise, my friend,—
Love is not always blind ;—
We that know not whither we tend,
We that struggle behind,
This was the patient track, we will say,
Here, where the strong feet trode,
On to the dawn of a clearer day,
On to the heights of God.

THE ROBIN AND THE CREDENCE

I

It was the blessed Christmas morn,
When for our solace Christ was born.

The Church was swept and garnished well ;
The pine-boughs made a wholesome smell ;

Then, ere the great bells, far aloof,
Jangled and hummed above the roof,

In silence came the ancient priest,
To bless the house and set the feast.

He carved the bread of wheat-flour fine,
In chalice poured the fragrant wine,

THE ROBIN AND THE CREDENCE

Soon by the spoken word to be
Instinct with deep Divinity.

Then stored the credence point-device,
To serve the holy Mysteries,

But ere the sacred veil he laid,
He humbly knelt, and softly prayed.

II

Meanwhile, across his ordered prayer,
Fell tender flutterings through the air,

Like dainty cherubs sailing by
On some light-hearted ministry,

A bird, incomparably drest
In downy cape and ruby vest,

THE ROBIN AND THE CREDENCE

(That bird who roused the timid rage
Of serious folk on pilgrimage ;

He munched his spidery food, and made
Interpreter o'ershoot his trade :)

He perched, and swooped, and shyly veered,—
The priest across his fingers peered ;—

Upon the credence lit and paced,
And found the banquet to his taste ;

The food, he thought, that came at call,
Was set and consecrate for all

Whoe'er the precinct duly trode,
For me, or any child of God.

He ate, approved, and ate his fill,
Then piped a grace with right goodwill.

THE ROBIN AND THE CREDENCE

III

Then creaked the door : the ringers came,
Came clattering child, and feeble dame,

To seek, like Anna, long and late,
Her Lord within the Temple gate ;

Sir Redbreast saw them ; at the view
The thankful sinner upward flew,

There in the rafters pluming sate,
Aloft, secure, inviolate ;—

The old priest rising from his knees
Repaired the tiny ravages,

It pleased him that the sacred feast
Was thus diminished, thus increased ;

THE ROBIN AND THE CREDENCE

Though God, he thought, still waits to bless
The meat with grace and godliness,

Yet 'twas no harm (perchance he erred)
The benediction of a bird !



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